

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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### ANDRUS COMMENDS ALASKA GOVERNOR HAMMOND; EXERCISES 204e

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today commended Alaska Governor Jay Hammond's decision to withdraw nine million acres of state land selections which overlap lands within the boundaries of proposals for national conservation systems. In addition, Secretary Andrus has extended the comment period on the draft supplement by two days to November 22nd.

"Governor Hammond recognizes that the National Interest and the State of Alaska's interest are not inherently in conflict," Andrus said. "This action by Governor Hammond will, hopefully, signal an end to the harsh accusations and bitterness which has surrounded the land selection process and is in keeping with an earlier agreement between him and me."

Secretary Andrus also reiterated a commitment he has made to Governor Hammond to remove impediments to State land selections in areas not being considered for conservation. "There is an obligation on the part of the government to support the legitimate claims of the State of Alaska to land," Andrus said. "So long as the State is willing to recognize the National Interest in Alaska I will do everything possible to make sure that the State interests are equally taken care of."

"In addition," Secretary Andrus said, "the Department is moving as quickly as possible to convey lands that are already legally selected by the State."

On Tuesday the State of Alaska filed State land selections for 41 million acres with the Bureau of Land Management. Under the Statehood Act Alaska is entitled to 104 million acres of land. These selections would complete the State's selection process.

However, up to nine million acres of land selected by the State is within boundaries of areas being considered for executive branch protection.

The composite boundaries were outlined in a draft supplement to the 1974 Environmental Impact Statement on Alaska National Interest Lands. The draft supplement examining executive branch alternatives for protection was required because Congress adjourned this year without acting on Alaska land withdrawals which expire on December 17.

(More)

The Carter Administration has proposed conservation areas in Alaska totaling 92.5 million acres. Legislation passed by the House of Representatives in May covered 122 million acres including the National Petroleum Reserve. Legislation reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but never acted on by the Senate, covered about 96 million. The draft supplement boundaries are a composite of all three approaches, excluding the petroleum reserve, for a total of 99.6 million acres.

The Secretary noted, also, that the Administration is considering the State's offer of a negotiated settlement of disputes over State land conveyances, but no decision has been made.

This week State officials offered to "defer" action for one year on a lawsuit challenging the protection process which the Department has put in motion. In return, the State asked the Department to agree not to use Antiquities Act protection for Alaska lands. The 2 day extension of the comment period will provide time for the Administration to complete its review of the offer.

In addition Secretary Andrus today exercised his authority under Section 204e of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to withdraw for three years all lands in Alaska which have been under consideration for inclusion in the national conservation systems. This action encompasses the composite boundaries of all the various d-2 proposals, including the Administration's recommendations, the House bill, H.R. 39, the Senate Committee version of H.R. 39, and some other lands.

This action by Secretary Andrus does not pre-empt the ongoing process of establishing protection for Alaska National Interest Lands which will be completed before current withdrawals expire December 17, nor does it foreclose consideration of the State settlement offer.

Following close of the comment period and finalization of the draft environmental supplement to the 1974 final environmental impact statement, Secretary Andrus said he and President Jimmy Carter will decide among several authorities for permanent protection including the Antiquities Act and other sections of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

"This action is aimed at protecting the integrity of Alaska lands and is in both the National Interest and the state's interest because it assures that there will be no questionable mining claims or other complications regarding this land until final decisions are made," Andrus said.

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